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RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO 0483
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE 4172
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB 2988
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000920

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SUBJECT: ALBANIA: LULL IN GOVERNMENT-OPPOSITION WARFARE

REF: A. TIRANA 905
[1](#)B. TIRANA 872
[1](#)C. TIRANA 809

Classified By: A/DCM Paula S. Thiede, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Thanks to EC-OSCE-hosted "coffee negotiations," the Democratic Party (the largest party in the majority) and the Socialist Party (the largest opposition party) broke the logjam preventing forward movement on electoral reform and organization of local elections. The agreement addresses opposition demands for changes in the Central Election Commission, media oversight commissions, and temporary voters' lists. We have welcomed the fragile peace, and our European partners will do the same. The truce should create conditions for a peaceful opening session of Parliament on September 4, but it is uncertain if the peace can hold. Both sides remain extremely distrustful, and they have not reached agreement on the date for local elections. While the accord has been mostly welcomed in political circles, some politicians and some in civil society criticize the parties for amending the Constitution in order to resolve their differences. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Late in the evening of August 30, three representatives of the ruling Democratic Party (DP) (Bamir Topi, DP Parliamentary Group Leader; Ilir Rusmali, Deputy PM; and Ylli Pango, Vice Chair of Parliament's media commission) and three from the opposition Socialist Party (SP) (Ben Blushi, Political Secretary; Ylli Bufi, Deputy Speaker of Parliament; and Valentina Leskaj, Chair of the media commission) signed an agreement that may pave the way for further cooperation to organize local elections. (Points of agreement follow in para 8.)

[1](#)3. (C) There were no international observers at the signing. Diplomats will not publicly acknowledge brokering the deal; if asked, our European colleagues will admit to offering "coffee, tea and hospitality" for occasional meetings between Albanian politicians. In fact, however, EC Charge Hubert Petit was a leading facilitator of the negotiations, together with OSCE Head of Presence Pavel Vacek and FRG Charge Joern Beissert. (Cover for the negotiations was provided by a request from the GOA for an EC and Council of Europe (COE) review of media legislation for compliance with EU standards. Therefore, Petit and the COE representative initiated the negotiations, folding in Vacek and Beissert (Germany represents Finland as the EU Presidency country) when talks moved into the political realm.)

¶4. (C) The media has occasionally credited the Embassy and the Ambassador with a role larger than the moral suasion actually offered and has speculated on the nature of foreign involvement. We have agreed to keep the spotlight on the Albanians)- in the hope that in the future, they may be capable of negotiating on their own. The agreement was reached only after the international facilitators withdrew, essentially telling the Albanians "time is up." This prompted a flurry of mobile phone negotiating rounds, leading to final resolution. Petit and his colleagues described an atmosphere rife with distrust.

¶5. (C) The date for the next elections was not addressed, although SP leader Rama attempted to insert a delay into the text toward the end of negotiations. Petit told him it had not been one of the opposition's original conditions and refused to consider it. Rama's recent public remarks seem to have softened, slightly, demands that elections be held next spring, suggesting only that it would be difficult technically to have elections in the winter. (The OSCE agrees.) The PM announced that he thinks elections should be held December 24, but that they could be November 20-January 20. President Moisiu's Diplomatic Adviser told Charge he thinks it would be better to delay elections until January 17 to avoid holiday conflicts for both voters and possible international monitors. (The Central Election Commission (CEC) has said the elections should be held between December 20 and January 20. There is debate within the legal community about the legal deadline for elections.)

¶6. (C) Most in political circles have welcomed the agreement, if with doubts about implementation. Some, however, in both political and civic/intellectual circles, have criticized resorting to Constitutional amendments to settle petty political feuds. Albania's Constitution has not been amended to date, and according to these critics, should not be for the sake of political expediency. Several points in the agreement will require cooperation between opposition and majority to amend both law and the Constitution, providing more opportunities for renewed breakdown.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The fact that the parties reached agreement is clearly positive. It would have been better had they had the courage, will and responsibility to do so without international intervention, but virtually no one, especially Albanians, thought that could happen (Ref A) as the dispute dragged on. Tensions remain high, although we are guardedly optimistic that the September 4 opening session of Parliament will not replicate the physical melee of July 28,s closing (Ref C). A big question remains whether the parties, who have limited trust or confidence in each other, can take the next steps to implement the agreement. We will continue to press them to do so, and OSCE will be pushing to organize elections.

¶8. (SBU) The agreement reached by the majority and opposition has twelve points:

¶1. Expands membership on the Regulatory Council for Radio and Television (KRRT) from five to seven members, with the two new nominees to come from civil society, nominated by the opposition. (The KRRT issues radio and TV frequencies and is generally considered a lucrative board to which to be appointed.)

¶2. Expands membership on the Council for Public Radio and Television (KRTSH) from seven to eleven members, with the four new members to represent civil society and to be nominated by the opposition, with one nominee to have majority agreement. No vote on the new members can occur until agreement is reached between opposition and majority on the fourth nominee. (The KRTSH regulates public TV and radio.)

¶3. Calls for legislation to require qualified majority voting for decisions in both councils on &major issues8 to be determined by Parliament.

¶4. Calls for a joint initiative by MPs from opposition and majority to introduce the amendments required above.

¶5. Calls for amendments to provide for qualified majority

voting on future appointments to the KRRT and the KRTSH.

¶16. Calls for amending the Constitution to enlarge the CEC from seven to nine members. Both new members would be selected by Parliament, with the Social Movement for Integration (LSI, opposition) and the Demo-Christian Party (PDK, governing coalition) jointly nominating for the positions.

¶17. Stipulates that simple majority on the CEC is five-four and qualified majority is six-three.

¶18. Makes the opposition Deputy CEC Chair a co-chair, to replace the chairman if required, co-represent the institution and co-sign all issues.

¶19. Agrees that temporary registers will be "cleaned up" before 20 October 2006 and will thereafter cease to be used as a source of voters' lists for elections, that both sides will cooperate at all levels to achieve this objective, and that both sides agree to delete all references to the temporary register from the Electoral Code.

¶10. Calls for resumption of the work of the ad hoc committee on electoral reform.

¶11. Calls for amending the Constitution to extend the mandate of local officials to four years. (Note: The EU called for this, in conformity with EU norms.)

¶12. Calls for future general and local elections in either Spring (April-May) or Autumn (October-November), every four years.

CRISTINA